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THE MERMAID

And Other Poems by

THOMAS McKEAN

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THE MERMAID

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

THOMAS McKEAN
Author of "The Vortex"

BOSTON
RICHARD G. BADGER
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1907

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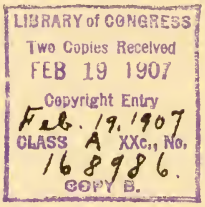

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The Gorham Press, Boston

I dedicate this little book of verses to
NANCY BRINLEY BISPHAM
in grateful remembrance of her helpful aid
in preparing them.

NEWPORT, 1906

CONTENTS

		PAGE
1	*The Mermaid*	9
2	*The Garden of Eden*	22
	I. *Adam*	22
	II. *Eve*	26
3	*The Light-House* . . . . . (*Adapted from the French*)	33
*4	*To Nancy*	40
*5	*Good-Night, Sweet*	41
6	*The Message of the Sea*	42
7	*The True Rondeau*	43
8	*Two Verses*	44
*9	*In A Garden Fair*	45
10	*Go! Little Book*	46

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The Mermaid

THE MERMAID

Out of the silver sea a woman's form,
From crystal depths before the pearl light broke,
Or night in travail bore the new-born day,
Rose from the boundless deep in beauty clad,
From angels or from devils having seized
The secret of the skies, the earth, the sea,
And underneath the water limitless.

Within the confines of her hidden pool
She easily with aimless labour darts,
Now hiding in some cleft, or diving low
To sound the lucid waters, till she creeps
With laughter light, and grace of elfin sprite,
Up to her couch among the rocks, to sing
Her songs, sweet music full of love, or death
To those, who listen and obey her call.
Grey was the whispering sea, and grey the rocks,
And wan was she, the while the moon-kissed rays
Were dying, and she grasped their silver strands
To weave a coronal, or else to deck
Their glistering brightness on her supple limbs;
As one by one are loosened, these she seeks
To seize, but all are lost within the depths
Of brine beneath, yet rise a second time

As foam that touches timidly the base
On which she lies. The music of the spheres
Grows louder as she sighs her lullaby,
Till thunder greets the ceasing of Night's pain,
And lazily the mermaid ends her song
To watch the advent of the tender day.
A sudden silence rends the ardent east,
While o'er the scene a softness slowly spreads
To kiss the teeming earth, the sea, the sky,
With blushes, which dispel the leaden hue,
That Night had used before so lavishly.
A little sigh, an idle puff of wind,
Now whispers to the ever-curling waves,
Which ruffle soon the bosom of the deep,
In fugues of never-ending cadences.
Before the glow, which stretches forth on high.

Fast fades the noble face of mystic Night,
That face, which bears the splendid stamp of death,
Until within the twinkling of an eye,
Rides forth the sun in majesty of gold.
A change has come upon the prospect new,
And stains with colours delicate and soft,
All nature in sweet hues of happiness,
Till where a short time since dark sadness reigned,
And hearts were great with sorrow infinite,
Now shines the eye of God all joyously

To change the souls of all created things,
To feed, to calm their spirits with His peace.
Not so the syren, for her heart is flint;
Her eyes, those windows of the living soul,
Are narrowed till two lines alone appear,
And coldly gleam, the face is pallid, set,

And strong the force of her devouring greed.
Her head within the hollow of her arm
Is pillowed, and thus motionless she waits,
Save where in rhythmic measure slow she waves
Her scaly tail like some wild tiger's mate.
Still slower breaks her evanescent smile,
And cold her mood like some volcano sleeps,
To flash in sudden splendour, which destroys,
Then whirls her victim to his watery tomb.
In marble calm she patient bides her time,
Like some cold snake in seeming torpor wrapt,
She waits all coiled to give the deadly thrust,
Which drives her trembling prisoner to his fate.
A symphony of cruel loveliness,
She sings her fascinating roundelay,
And looks nor east nor towards the distant west,

But bends her gaze intent on hazy space.
What are the thoughts bound in her stony breast,
What are the horrid deeds she plans to do?

What needs for vengeance, must so fair a shape
Thus harbour malice? Ask the moaning waves,
Which cry their message to eternity,
Or seek the sphinx, within whose pulseless heart
Is locked the secrets of the ages dead,
And strive to read the answer if ye can!
O'er rippling waves in silence frigid still
She follows in its flight a wingéd gull,
And purls half sleepily her rhapsody,
As if she charmed to rest some tired child.
With pauses frequent ever and anon
She moves with sensuous grace her languid frame,
And stretches out her arms above her head,

In passionless desire of love's delight;
For now insensibly the hypnotic chant
Gains force as more intense the music grows,
And thus she rests her cheek upon her hand,
The while her elbow pointing towards the line,
Which marks the meeting-place of Heaven and earth,
Decries a sail. Another comes apace,
And straight expectant grows the cruel mouth,
As in and out her pointed tongue, her lips
Caresses; lurid pants the melody,
And wings of tiny craft athwart the deep
Sail yon and hither, till unlike the rest,
One drifts apart and sails away alone.

There, solitary sits a fisherman,
His nerveless hand the tiller feebly grasps,
That answers only to the madrigal.

So swiftly runs the craft, nor heeds the man
A warning from his friends, who shout to him,
But rushes on to some compelling spot;
His looks are wild and haggard are his eyes,
Yet once he turns and looks despairing back.
Alas! the little fleet is dimly seen,
And ghostly falls the picture on his view,
For drifting clouds of mist are blotting out
The scene of loving friends and distant home.
Within a world of ever growing white,
With pallid countenance and staring gaze,
Aye drifts he on, all distant from his course,
Bereft of reason and sweet memory.
Naught hears be but the sound of music sweet,
Which strikes with dull insistence on his ear,
And o'er and o'er again the raucous beat

Marks on his throbbing heart a purple wound;
He heeds it not, the numb unconscious pain,
But yields himself like one, who soon must die,
With hair all matted on his humid brow,
As louder swells the false triumphant note,
The mist is lifting and the wretched fool

Perceives too late the angry line of white,
Straight in his path, where lo! the foaming waves
Now crown the hoary head of rocks and hide
The circling waters of the deadly pool,
Above whose horrid depths the syren lies.
For one brief trembling instant he has cast
An upward glance, then all fades from his sight,
But in that glance, he sees her radiant face,
Framed by the mass of pallid sea-green hair.
Just as the boat upon the cruel rocks

Is ground to atoms, sudden swift she bends,
And draws him senseless up as hunters snare
Their nets around the splendid king of beasts.
Yet, quiet as he seemed beside her there,
No motive quivered in her bird-like look,
Nor glance of blood-warm human sympathy,
For claw-like hands, which do not grasp or snatch,
Are inconsistent with the eyes that gloat,
And pierce his seeming form inanimate.
Now that he rests beside her, hers indeed,
What is her sentiment or what her plan?
Can seer or sybil filled with fervour rapt
E'en guess the final scroll of her desire,
Or solve the meaning of her attitude?
Implacable, immovable, she bides,
Though not in mood, uncertain, wavering,

But rather like some ancient deity,
Upon whose lofty pleasure patience waits.
With some rude implement her hair she combs,
As warbling low her Lydian measures sweet,
She heedeth not the unconscious fisher lad.
Poor victim he, of circumstances rare,
Insensible to words or bantering look,
A life suspended in a woman's power,
Awaits the fiat of her sleeping word.
A word, a passing look, her very will
Shall summon him to rapture of despair,
Or by their action drive him to his death.
What unknown seedling borne by idle wind
Shall fall by chance indeed on fertile ground,
Or natheless hap to find its final home
Amid some rocky soil all rank with weeds

And perish wretchedly? God knows the life
Of every living one and orders it
According to His Will. We fail to see
The meaning of His wisdom great and good,
Oft losing sight in human ignorance,
Of what he knoweth best is for our need.
Here is a man of honest life and parts,
Encircled firmly by the wily plots
Of an enchanting syren, who intends
To order him to do her certain will.

Her presence is the ground on which he sleeps,
What shall the harvest prove itself to be?
Thrice wretched seed! blown hither by the force
Of her desire, on her depends your goal.
Can love awake in such a being's heart,
Or has she saved him merely to destroy?

If she all loveless magnetises thus,
And draws him from his own familiar hearth,
She must eradicate the deep-set thought
Of sweet-faced loving wife and children three,
Before she can obtain her power and end.
One passing glance into her cruel eye,
Has killed the tendrils of his daily life,
The mind within his body is a blank,
And ripe for ultimate development.
We cannot tell why He, who overlooks
Should bring designedly this guileless soul
Into deliberate danger; for what end?
Is there a danger lurking? wait and see.
A sudden change came o'er her reverie,
That bridged the awful chasm of her thought,
As eyes are fixed upon the offing dim,

Where rides the remnant of the fisher fleet.
Upon the pinions of a fitful breeze
The clouded atmosphere is carried on,

Embracing with its subtle restlessness,
The waiting group of baffled anxious men.
They, still in consternation of the plight,
Which robbed them of their comrade suddenly,
Directed frightened looks towards the line
Of his departure, but they feared to seek
The hidden way and follow in his wake.
Too well they knew the secret of the maid,
Who dwelt beside the dreaded rocky coast,
And oft the lengths of winter nights were filled
With stories of her loveliness and charm:
These tales like songs of ancient minstrelsy
Were told from father unto youthful son;

But horror mingled with the story too,
And blood would freeze within the youthful veins
Of those, who listened and a cry of fright
Would break upon the hush, the bated breath,
Which ever greet the telling of such tales.
Oft in the stillness of the quiet night,
One of these little tender ones would moan,
And starting, cry upon its mother's breast,
Mistaking dreams for dim reality.
The dream was always of a maiden fair,
A maiden with a voice of velvet soft,
Who smiled and singing smiled yet once again;

Then sudden came a change upon that smile,
And lo! each child awoke and sobbing said:
The grinning semblance of a mask of death
Had darkly flashed before his waking eye;

The fathers laughed, but in their laughter lurked
The shadow of a mirthless gayety:
For man reputed to have looked upon
The syren's lovely face had ne'er returned,
But many a one had heard her liquid tones,
And hearing crossed themselves all piously.
How many baseless fears in life are found,
Against which struggles are of no avail,
And arguments or reason give no aid
To their solution? When the mind is warped,
And thus is forced into a stilted groove,
How can our human judgment fail to give
A nerveless rein to our presentiment?
Such fears there are, which have no basis deep,
And just because they are unreal and false,
Bring greater trouble and uneasiness.

The group of men now meet in council grave,
To find a means, if possible, to help
Their vanished comrade, but the way proved hard
To seek, for they feel soon that God himself

Is far away, and in His saving stead,
They, face to face with something must contend,
Which lacks the touch of human kindliness,
Itself relentless, powerful and dark.
Against the unknown forces all unseen,
What armour shall withstand the arrows sharp,
Which pierce the very soul and wound the heart,
Or what strong shield shall ward away the slings,
Impelled by powers themselves invisible ?
More dauntless men than these can ne'er be found,
Brave, fertile in resources all of them,
Who pray to God for guidance in their need,

Declaring Him their Heavenly Father wise,
Whose counsel must be sought by fervent prayer,
And gained alone, in lowly postures bowed
Before the Throne of Grace, the Judgment seat.
The murmur of their agitated words,
By wanton winds are wafted slowly back,
To where the mermaid sits relentlessly,
Beside her fallen victim, calm, inert.
A cunning look, the burden of the breeze
Imparts, a cruel glance of subtlety,
And turning with a sigh of tenderness,
Upon whose tendrils clings a feline grace,
She seeks to hold him in subjection firm.

She knows full well a touch with passion fraught,
Will call him from the regions cold and drear,
Half-way between the realm of Sleep and Death,

Whence he has slowly drifted by her will,
Yet once again to waking consciousness.
Why does she hesitate, what motive rears
Its ugly head and peers between the web
Of her desire? What hidden silence chokes
The advance of her destroying poisoned lips,
Which in a kiss of deep intensity,
Will bare and germinate the desert waste
Of his poor simple soul? and by this kiss
She finally will seal him for her own.
The fishermen beyond the fragile pale
Of her dominion know full well the force,
The fearful vigour of her inmost thought;
From stories too, they all have surely learned
Of what they fear must be their comrade's end,
But still in force they hope to win the strife,

And pushing forward with concerted strength,
They plan to storm the wind-swept citadel.
The advance once started hearts grow brave and
light,
Till sudden every man rests on his oar,
And listens to a distant cry of fear,

Which rings with sadness of a parting knell,
Upon their quaking hearts; alas! they know
The interpretation of that cruel sound,
And bow their heads weighed down by sorrow's
yoke;
Yet while they sadly wend their homeward way,
They blanch in terror, as they fainter hear
The cloying sweetness of her mocking song,
A song of love, of sleep and sudden death,
A soul's despairing and a woman's face;
But in the cadence of the lay they read,
As god the Father willed from knowledge vast,

The lesson of his sentence ultimate:
"It is His Will," they cry in unison,
And comforted, they praise His Holy Name,
Accepting calmly with their simple faith,
The strength of His omnipotent decree:—
The curtain drops and finished is the play.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN

I

"Adam"

In ancient days before the world began,
God spoke in majesty of power and might,
And made the earth and all that therein is,
The lakes, the mountains too, the land and sea;
In six full days He fashioned it, and when
His labour finished was, He took His rest
Upon the seventh, looking on his acts.

He made the sun to shine by day, the moon
By night, the waters underneath the earth,
And all the treasures in it made He too.
The labours of the Lord were set apart,
One act of great dominion for each morn,
For, at the first the earth was shapeless, void,
And darkness brooded on the water's face.
His spirit moved upon the deep and cried:—
"Let there be light," and straightway o'er the world
A bright light shone, dividing day from night;
And thus was ended the initial work.

Next God divided earth from lofty Heaven,
The waters from the land, and He decreed,
That grass should grow upon the fertile land,
And lo! He saw the sight of all was good.
He caused the teeming herb to put forth seed,

And budding trees all great with luscious fruit,
Within whose essence lies the seed, were brought
To fulness in the smiling meadows' breast.
The restless waters too were troubled sore,
And brought forth fish, each of its several kind,
Increasing thus according to His Will:
Out of his loving heart created He
Fowls of the air and every living thing,
Creeping, crawling, every moving creature,
Each one from Mother Earth evolved and formed.
Then lastly, made He man in image like
Unto Himself, to have dominion o'er
All things created, male and female both,
And food for all He did provide as well.
So, God the Father made and fashioned man
From dust of earth and in his nostrils breathed

The breath of life to be a living soul.
The seventh day became an holy one,
And God almighty blessed and hallowed it,

For on that day He rested from His task.
In Eden planted God a garden fair,
With trees abounding pleasant to the sight,
The tree of life itself, of knowledge good
And evil in the midst; the river too,
Which rose and flowed from it, a four-fold stream.
God in the garden put the new-made man
To tend and keep it, giving of his care,
And told him he might freely eat the fruit
Of all the trees save that of knowledge of
The good and evil of the world of man.
"The penalty for this malfeasance grave,
Or disobedience of my Will, is death."

God, walking in the garden sweet, thus spoke:—
"It is not good for man to be alone,
And I shall bring an help-mate unto thee,
Oh! Adam, first the tiller of the soil."
A multitude of cattle, beasts and fowls
He brought into the garden, and He said:—
"These creatures shalt thou name with names of thy
Devising, finding doubtless from their fold
An help-meet worthy of thy caliber."
But, from the motley crew of wingéd birds,
Of cattle horned, or creeping creatures, none
Were so considered by the man as fit

To be a true companion unto him.
The Lord on Adam's shoulder placed His hand,
And straightway fell on him a sleep profound;
Then God stretched forth and deftly took a rib

From Adam's side, and swiftly closed the wound,
While from the rib He made a woman fair,
To be a sweet companion unto him,
Who from the earth had come, a human soul.
God took the perfect form, the woman made
From man, and led her unto him, then cried
The husband:—"She shall be bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh; Eve shall she be called,
The universal Mother of the world,
And she of her free will shall leave her home
And cleave to me, for we shall be one flesh,"
So, God within the garden left them there,
Both naked, yet in innocence complete,
They, hand in hand, the lovely pathways sought,
To dwell therein in happiness and peace.

II

"Eve"

One evening when the embers of the sun
Were dying and the orange of the sky
Was drifting from its royal purple tint
To fainter pinks, Eve sat among the flowers,
In meditation, born of idleness.
It was a moment for a poet's dream,
When hearts are full of indefinable
Regret, spun of a subtle gossamer
Of irridescent woof, the rainbow bridge,
Upon whose fragile span, in idle mode,

Our thoughts drive on, untamed and fugitive.
Impressions grow more trackless, as the greys
Of night replace the lengthening shades which hide
The splendid pageant of the dying day,
Then clouds with molten silver lining hued,
Obscure the tangled webs of our desire,
And feebly clutch the heart in strife to wound
Its peace. The drowsy murmur of the bees
Is stilled, and as the shades of evening fall,
The inward tremor of our deeper thoughts
Is hushed amid the silence of the hour
And stays the unfinished labour of the mind.
The fretted passion of the throbbing night
Absorbs the peace within our beating hearts,

And cheers the pregnant hush of tenderness,
Which clothes our very being with its strength.

A gentle murmuring among the leaves,
Told to the untutored woman lying there,
That those soft chords of closest harmony,
Played by the wanton winds invisible,
Announced the rising of the silver moon:
The prelude o'er a ghostly voice then broke
Upon the sweetness of the instruments,
And filled the hollows of the lambent breeze
With ecstasy. A song of wonderful
Compelling strength, intangible yet tinged
With dire intensity, although the words
And meaning were enwrapped in mystery,
Smote on her spirit with insistent beat,
But placed no tension on her supple mind.
She heard and listened eagerly until
The orb of night poured forth its mantling rays

Of pearly glow o'er all the magic scene,
And, then she saw the singer motionless;
It was not Adam, as she fondly hoped,
But subtlest of the beasts, the fowls, the birds,
Which God had brought into the confines of
The garden, there the serpent stood revealed,
All coiled about a tree, regarding her.

No word she spoke, but as she met its eye,
The song was stilled, and slyly it returned
Her smile, in plaintive fashion, cold, intense.
With glance of stone still glassy fixed on her,
The serpent glided to her feet; no fear she had,
But laughed aloud, when lo! it slowly spoke:—
" Oh! lady Eve, I fain would go with thee,
Within this garden fresh and green, and show

The magic wonders hid within its space,
Those wonders in the moon-light best revealed,
Whose knowledge will bring love and power divine;
Oh! fairest lady, come, oh! come with me,
That I may teach thee of that wondrous faith,
By which high mountains move in orbits great,
And I will show thee too, the kingdoms of
The earth, and all the precious treasures massed
Therein. By lofty power within me placed,
I'll give thee certain means to see the world
In all its phases, bring delight to thee
And shower bounties on thy glorious form.
Oh! taste but for an instant of that food,
The luscious fruit, which in the centre stands,
And thou shalt then possess the splendid world:
The earth is God's and all that therein is,

But thou and thine shalt surely share it too."
The woman smiled and marked the reptile glide
Into the path of light, then shyly rose
And fluttered in its wake. With trembling steps,
She strove to follow hesitating, for
She felt the lack of logic in the speech:
Deductions such as these from premise false,
Instinctively, she knew should not affect
Her judgment, but she did not have the force
To follow her convictions. Questions like
To these depend on instinct, quite as much
As on intrinsic knowledge drawn in fact
From standards recognised by all as such,
And, so at least, she paused in panting fear;
The reptile turned and scanned her pallid face,
It noted well her trembling hands, but kept

Its gravest glance upon her eye, and then
Began to speak:—"Why think ye God Himself
Created you and yours? What was His plan,
His purpose in so doing? Is it right
For you to be in ignorance of what
He knows is best? Ye are but captives true,
For you and Adam are but creatures, here
Within this little world, because ye will
Not raise your hand to grasp the certain means

To free yourself and learn your destiny."
The wily reptile wavered, and Eve paused
In anguish, striving to deride her fears,
That made her stop, in indecision, but
Again she trembled, as the thought of God,
To whom they owed their very being tried
To ensnare the faith of her discovered friend,

Intruding on her wayward thoughts, she felt
Herself at last to be possessed and held
By burning anguish. Meanwhile as she walked
All slowly onward, sudden with a gasp,
She cast her eyes upon the fatal tree.
Her indecision vanished, when the snake
With ready courtesy, held forth the fruit,
A rosy apple; this she took and held
Against her breast. The pangs of conscience were
Appeased, for now the golden prize is won,
And turning, calls she Adam to her side.
She holds the ripened fruit against her lips,
And smells it long before her pearly teeth
Break through the skin and hands the remnant to
Her mate; then flees away to hide herself,
With mounting blushes dyed. So Adam too

In mad despatch, to some close bower hies,
For both were conscious of their nakedness,

And feared the anger justifiable
Of their dear Lord, for they alas! both feared
To die. But all too soon they hear His voice,
And hide themselves in terror and despair.
'"Come forth, ye sinful children," cried the Lord,
" Ye shall not die, but this shall be your lot.
You, Adam, shall endure by labour hard,
With sweat shall ye prepare the ground, to earn
Your daily bread; and you, my Eve, my child,
Why have you done this thing?" Eve answered thus:—
" The serpent tempted me, and I did taste
The fruit of disobedience to Thy will:
To Adam gave I too, and he did eat."
" List! woman, this shall be thy wretched fate."

The Lord began in sadness infinite,
" In trouble shalt thou bring forth children, and
I greatly will increase thy sorrow's pain:
But, thou, oh! wretched reptile, devil clad
In serpent's form, now get thee hence, and go
Upon thy belly so for evermore.
Ye all from dust were made, and once again
To dust ye shall return, and so I drive
Ye from this Paradise, for fear ye eat
The fruit upon the tree of life, and live
For aye." Thus sadly went the twain away

Into the world of pain, and standing there
A cherubim with flaming sword, that turns
In every way, shall safely keep the path
Of life, and sternly halt the steps of sin.

THE LIGHT-HOUSE

The wind-blown off-shoot of a parent stem,
Once tendril of the west-most diadem
Of Brittany, rough-hewn, but now detached
From helpless headlands, which in sadness watched
Their wayward child, adrift upon the deep
And foaming fields; where lo! the dizzy leap,
From rocky coast in splendid disarray,
Off-clefts, in subtle mode, as night from day,
The island from the mainland; thus the waif

Goes on its lonely mission, anchored, safe
From rude embrace of wanton waves or winds,
That senses dull, like wine that slyly binds
Its helpless victims at the jewelled feasts,
Or like unto the sharp-fanged, snarling beasts,
That strike with force their lawful prey but fail
To stun them, as the gaping wound, the frail
Life blots in crimson tide upon the floor
Of tesselated flags. There, on the shore
The ancient light-house stands, a smiling sign,
With gleaming face and steady eye benign,
The hope of sailors on the wintry seas,
When anger whistles in the lightning breeze.

For centuries untold, it had withstood
The force of gales, the winds, in captious mood,
And still it rests from father unto child,

Its care devised in sequence undefiled.
Throughout the pallid Winter or the Spring,
The Summer and the Autumn, passions sing
In cadences, which never cease; the bleak
Wind screams and moans, thus driving white-
pained forth
The furies of the waters, sudden then
The winds sink to a low-breathed whisper, when
The love-lorn wavelets rise to ecstasy,
Attempting conquest of the powers that be:
From south, from east, and from the scarlet west,
The winds ran envious, on chaotic quest,
All aimless in their wandering, eager, rife
For cruelty, relentless for the strife,
Which goads them restless on with flying heels.
But who can tell the loneliness, which steals,
The subtle sense of desolation drear,

Upon the mind, it is not groundless fear,
But horror, that must be with strength defeat,
To save the tottering reason from escheat,
And so preserve from budding jeopardy,

The guerdon of its own identity?
Ah! reader, if ye chance to read these lines,
Can'st realise the trembling heart, that pines
For loving sympathy of sweet converse
With those of flesh, though we should not coerce
Men, who, of loneliness, endure the pains,
The watch-dogs of the ever-foaming plains;
But man exists, who takes the means to live,
And weaves the evil with the good, to give
The best he has to his career, and sifts
The chaff from sun-kissed wheat to use the gifts
God gave him, sinking self into the shades,

Those flaming, sacred, sacrificial glades,
In which are burnt the dregs of all desires,
That stem in infinite degree, the fires
Which should so brightly glow before the Throne
Of Heaven, when tasks are but a duty done.
Not so young Jasper, who for six full moons,
Had lived to aid his father on the dunes
And arid wastes of this sad island home,
A shrine of mercy in a vaulted dome:
His was the task to trim the lamp, the eye
Of human make, which saves from misery
The fortunes of the toilers of the deep.
At night the aged parent takes his sleep,

And then the son, who feeds the fluid oil,
The matter grey, which crowns his nightly toil,
Thus giveth steady light unto that brain,

Which is the harbinger, upon the main,
To those, who brave the terrors of the sea,
Which heaveth sore impearled all grievously.
Of late his days upon the land were spent,
In some absorbing interest evident,
Yet Jasper's occupation still shall be
Unto his father, but a mystery;
The older guessed the soft entanglement
Of some sweet tender maid, as yet unshent,
Whose tendrils delicate upon this stretch
Of bareness, would droop and die: the wretch
Who plucks a tender blossom from its chaste
And comely garden, and upon a waste
Thus plants it without nurture succulent
For its support, commits a crime, and bent
On pleasure rifts unto those distant stars

The flaw in his poor lute, and thusly bars
The way to happiness of love divine,
Of gods and mortal men the nectar-wine.
Another cause beyond the father's ken
Lay coiled like poisoned asp, in tawny fen
About the soul of Jasper; and his heart

Enchained with fetters, by a crafty art
All forged and fastened, slaved him rabidly
With yearnings girt with daily ecstasy.
One afternoon, when lengthening shadows grew
And darkened slowly, as the black bats flew
More low to earth, he gave vent suddenly
To blinding tears of futile agony,
The blood in well-springs rising to his face.
There, stared the eyes from out the mottled lace
Of his complexion, sombre blotched with stains

Amid the pallid white; his penanced pains
Like snowy dews of death, a rosary,
Stood on his brow in cold rigidity.
Full many a time in frenzy wielded he,
Of ruddy flowers from drowsy fields, the lee,
To brew a beverage, and lo! the draught
Brought rosy dreams alway, then loud he laughed
To think his life oppressed could lightened be,
By simple, quiet means so easily.
But now the strength of noxious drugs was dulled,
And on this luckless day in vain he culled
The seeds of sleep to plant them in his pain,
But woe, alas! his ever-throbbing brain
Refused to yield the poppy harvest kind,
The magic meadows of his ghostly mind,
Wherein he wandered led by golden dreams;

Instead he woke with agonising screams,
O'ercome; in anguish sudden staggered he
Into his father's presence giddily.
Then passed a horrid scene, when moments few,
Are filled with such deep feeling, that anew
The frozen tongue cleaves to the mouth-roof fast,
E'en when the stage is blotted out, and passed
The incident, still sobbing at the roots
Of fear, as when, as if upon cleft lutes,
Were there such croaking, grating, phrases heard,
As those proceeding from the son, absurd,
Unreasonable, and too ridiculous
For deep consideration serious;
The sign of minds that are diseased or ill,
Which neither balance have nor conscious will.
The climax came when father unto son

Asked if the younger's nightly task was done;
No word spoke Jasper, glaring like some beast:
So pale he seemed, a death's head at the feast,
That father stared in terror at his child,
And marked his eye so bright, his looks so wild,
That for a certain space, he dared not shift
His own from Jasper's white-faced glance, nor lift
His agonising look to God to pray
For help. The wind moaned, rising as the day

In sudden tension died, the while a cry,
A distant shout for aid rang out nearby.
An answer burst forth from his brazen throat,
And rushed he to the ladder, that the boat
Might see the beacon, though the son had failed
To set it for the night, so it availed
No succour for the nonce. Would God he might

Endure, approach the dome and brand the light!
A second cry, more urgent, nearer, shrill
Broke on his ear, and at the sound, his will
Relaxed, but quickly grasping firmly hold
The rung below, he hung suspended, cold.
Within the twinkling of an eye, two hands
Were tightly clasped about his neck like bands
Of steel. Alas! how short the uneven fight,
As quick-breathed, he endured his awful plight;
Yet as the blood surged in his ears, he found
His knife, and struck the man, now bristled-
crowned
As any tiger, mad, through mist of red:
He buried once the dirk,—his son was dead.

TO NANCY

In tripping measures move your tiny feet
Caressed by slippers of a crimson hue;
Curved lips are parted when you start anew
Your dainty dance of fascinating beat.
So, blithesome now, in innocence complete
You flit away beneath the vault of blue,
Where angel faces e'er will smile on you
And kiss your cheek with happiness, my sweet.

No fairer painting would I ask to see,
Which to a jewelled palace of the earth
Has passed, in barter from some worldly mart,
Than you, my little child of destiny,
Who, first the princess at the hour of birth,
Are now the goaler of my captive heart.

GOOD-NIGHT, SWEET

With tiny arms about my neck thou'lt cling,
And lisping phrases murmur in my ear,
The while I bid thee, darling, not to fear,
For angels flitting by on unseen wing
A peaceful rest to thee will quickly bring;
So kiss me, for the magic hour draws near
When slumber like a skillful charioteer,
Will guide thee on thy drowsy journeying.

Alas! though God himself shall watch o'er thee,
Beware the sandman, when he comes in sight,
For eyes grow heavy as the sand is run,
Until his task is ended craftily
And consciousness is softly put to flight, . .
Then, good-night, sweet; God bless my little one.

THE MESSAGE OF THE SEA

Undaunted, yearning like the trackless sea,
We blindly rush apace, unsatisfied,
Till even as we crest the wave, we ride
All face to face with brooding misery.
We fail to recognise our destiny,
Amid the mazes of desires untried,
Though spirits of the sea have loudly cried
Their message through the winds: Eternity.

Is there an answer to the endless song?
Then, prithee tell me, where may it be found,
In joy, or grief, in life, in death, or sleep?
Ask God Himself, Who knowing right from wrong,
Alone can solve the riddle of the sound,
Flashed o'er the foaming meadows of the deep.

THE TRUE RONDEAU

The true rondeau should always smoothly go,
Yet with design in its construction flow;
Without an effort, but on reason based,
Thoughts not germane should quickly be effaced,
For, only thus the theme will clearly show.

With ingenuity, you must bestow
The exercise of care at first, and so
Produce like Villon, with his lively taste,
The true rondeau.

If you have written now ten lines, you know
The rhythm should be neither fast or slow;
Though rules are made to be defied, yet haste
Would spoil the whole, the singer be disgraced:
So, now you see, within the after-glow,
The true rondeau.

TWO VERSES

When you write a triolet,
All your phrases should run smoothly,
For you pay the measures' debt
When you write a triolet,
And your muse should not forget,
That the guiding rule is soothly,
When you write a triolet
All your phrases should run smoothly.

Our words, when first we come into the world,
  Are lisped, because our teeth are young and new;
Though, when life's span in fulness is unfurled,
  Our words are lisped, because our teeth are few.

IN A GARDEN FAIR

I dreamed a velvet rose enchanted me,
Blown forward by the tender South wind's stress
And swept in its own blithe unconsciousness
Light kisses wrought of airy phantasy
Upon my cheek, while I breathed quietly,
For fear the fleeting charm of its caress,
Like touch of living hands now motionless
In death, should vanish in eternity.

All roses fade, their petals one by one
Will fall to earth and dying disappear,
But echoes stay within the heart, the cry
Of tiny voices lives in mine, all spun
With silver threads of love; her voice I hear
And sudden catch my baby's laughing eye.

GO! LITTLE BOOK

Go! little book into the haunts of men;
Go! let the public judge thee, as it will.
To me thou art a fragment, like some rill,
Which plashing goes by fields and moorland glen
Towards the dark and distant ending, when
Thus carried past the loudly roaring mill,
It swiftly meets the restless deep, until
Within its depths 'tis lost and found again.

The world is like unto the striving sea,
Kind if it nothing costs, and cruel where
Mere sympathy is craved, relentless, for
Of anger subtle, it can never be,
In criticism just and free as air:
Go! little book, I cannot help thee more.

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